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ABSTRACT

Textual puzzles may be used in freshman composition or introduction to writing courses to emphasize word order and subject-predicate agreement. These sentence puzzles demonstrate that the English language depends primarily upon word order to convey meaning, and assist students to avoid blending statement and question word order in their sentences and to identify and correct their own errors in subject-verb agreement. Puzzles may be simple or complex, and may be used with individuals or groups. Once sentence puzzles have been mastered, paragraph puzzles (arranging sentences in logical order) and composition puzzles (shifting paragraphs to their most effective position) may be utilized. Several textual puzzles based on newspaper headlines are included in this paper, as are suggestions for other sources of textual puzzle materials. (Author/JDS)

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THE TEXTUAL PUZZLE TECHNIQUE

In order to help students at East Arkansas Community College improve their writing skills, I use textual puzzles to emphasize word order and subject-verb agreement. Professionally written essays provide excellent source material, but occasionally I use material from student themes. The puzzles require active student involvement, visual, mental, and physical.

I introduce the puzzles in Freshman Composition as well as in Introduction to Writing, a course designed to increase students' chances of achieving success in Freshman Composition. In Introduction to Writing, I begin with the sentence puzzle. But students in Freshman Composition usually have the necessary skills to permit them to begin with the paragraph puzzle, requiring them to arrange sentences in logical order. The students advance rather quickly to the composition puzzle, which requires them to shift each paragraph to its most effective position. In either case, I prepare the puzzles by placing all components (either words, sentences or paragraphs) for each puzzle on separate strips of paper and putting them into envelopes, one for each student.

Because English is analytic rather than synthetic, the textual puzzles demonstrate that the language depends primarily upon word order to convey its meaning. The first word order that I introduce is the subject-verb object (complement) sequence. Once students have mastered this basic word order, I introduce the word order for a question and for a base clause that begins with an expletive.

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Individually, each student in class works a simple puzzle, one that contains only two nouns (in the same number) and only one verb that agrees with either noun. Beginning with a puzzle such as bird nest builds The a, students feel immediately the thrill of success. Next, the students assemble in groups of two or three, all groups solving puzzles having identical pieces. These puzzles contain alternative singular and plural forms for subjects and verbs. Students explore a number of possible solutions. They work as a team and enter lively group discussions. When students read orally their own solutions, they become constructively critical of their own work and that of their group members or other classmates.

After approximately three weeks (nine fifty-minute periods) of practice with the sentence textual puzzles, students in Introduction to Writing are able to avoid blending statement and question word order in the sentences they write. In addition, they are able to identify and to correct their own errors in subject-verb agreement.

TEXTUAL PUZZLE

Objectives:

1. Students will solve (individually or in groups) textual puzzles or sentences designed to acquaint them with word order and verb forms.

2. Students will select appropriate verb forms in textual puzzles containing alternative forms.

3. Students will solve textual puzzles designed to acquaint them with paragraph development.

(See sample textual puzzle attached)

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TEXTUAL PUZZLE*

In an envelope containing the words below (each word on a separate segment of paper),

The	reports
manager	to
makes	the
make	auditor.
monthly	managers
financial	

students may form the following sentence: The manager makes monthly financial reports to the auditor. However, students are not limited to this word order. They may discover:

1. The possibility of at least three subjects: manager, managers, auditor
2. Two choices of verbs: makes, make
3. Monthly may serve as adjective or adverb
4. The adjective financial may modify manager, auditor, or reports
5. Two pieces of the puzzle must be discarded, depending upon the choice of singular or plural subject which of necessity controls the choice of verb.

Word order is somewhat controlled by punctuation: the capital letter in The and the period following auditor.

*For paragraph development, sentences on separate strips of paper may be substituted for individual words. Students will determine the topic sentence and place all other sentences in their most effective position.

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SENTENCE IDENTIFICATION

Structurally, there are a number of signs by which a student may identify a sentence. They are:

1. SUBJECT-PREDICATE STRUCTURE
2. FINITE VERB
3. NO SIGNAL OF SUBORDINATION
4. WORD ORDER
5. INTONATION
6. PUNCTUATION

Objective:

With these signals in mind (particularly the first four), the students will test newspaper headlines to determine whether the headlines qualify as sentences. When such headlines fail to qualify, students supply necessary characteristics.

(Sample headlines are attached.)

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A Texan Lost In Texas

Professor Studying Heat In Relation To Stupidity

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An associate professor at sons with all their sweat glands fully knocked out all the glass! If 92-degree heat will break operating, we'll bet it was and it ended up in a trash can glass, we're going into the re-

In applying the structural definition of a sentence, students discover that the headline above

1. Has no finite verb
2. Has no subject-predicate structure
3. Has the verbal studying, which suggests two possible uses:
   (a) it could be regarded as a participle in the clause studying heat in relation to stupidity, which modifies professor. In such a case, students must supply a predicate
   (b) studying could become a part of the verb phrase when preceded by a finite verb, such as is or was. In such a case, the student would need to make no further changes

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Metric Transition In U.S. To Be Long, Complex Task

In applying the structural definition of a sentence, students discover that the headline above

1. Contains an infinitive (to be) but has no finite verb
2. Has no subject-predicate structure
3. Can be transformed into a sentence by the insertion of a finite verb preceding to be. Such a verb could be is, was, or has

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2—Forrest City Times-Herald, Monday, October 18, 1976

Americans receive Nobel Prize honors

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) — Three Americans very happy," he said. "And that, yes, that is all," he added ford on Nov. 11, 1974 and found that their two research teams

2 Section A The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Sunday, Oct. 17, 1976

Saudi Intervention Brings Cease-Fire

The New York Times News Service

BEIRUT — Saudi Arabia intervened of West Beirut and southern Lebanon that is still under Palestinian control, Palestin-

Criticism is called cheap shot

LITTLE ROCK (AP) — Dr.

Thousands Rally To Support Hua

By The Associated Press

Hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers streamed into Shanghai's main boulevard yesterday, demanding punishment for Mao Tse-tung's widow and three

Although the four headlines above contain little more than the bare essentials, students will discover that these headlines qualify structurally as sentences.

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